Statement of Congresswoman Lofgren on the Introduction of the Vietnam Human Rights Act

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Washington, DC – Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) today made the following statement on the introduction of the Vietnam Human Rights Act.

"I would like to thank Congressman Smith for his tireless work in reintroducing this important legislation that will have a tremendous impact on improving the lives of thousands of people in Vietnam, Vietnamese refugees around the world, and Vietnamese immigrants in the United States. With your effort and the support of several other Members of Congress, we will succeed in getting this bill signed into law.

"As you know, I represent San Jose, California, a community greatly enriched by the presence of immigrants from around the world. Quite of few of my constituents came to San Jose as refugees, escaping oppressive regimes like Vietnam. San Jose is home to one of the largest Vietnamese communities in California, if not the United States. I have heard their stories, and I know first hand the religious persecution and political repression in Vietnam and the current violations of human rights by the Vietnamese government.

"The stories are more than egregious, for example, torture and sterilization of Montagnard Christians, detention and surveillance of journalists trying to report the truth in Vietnam, and imprisoning Buddhist monks for 25 years for working to improve human rights—not a crime as far as I know.

"I am here today raise my voice, as I have done so many times in the past and will to continue to do so in the future, to let the Communist Vietnamese government know that the United States will no longer tolerate these gross violations of human rights.

"The Vietnam Human Rights Act will produce results: it will force the government of Vietnam to change its ways or risk losing non-humanitarian assistance from the United States; it will fund Non-Governmental Organizations so they can improve the human rights situation in Vietnam and bring much needed democratic change to the government; we will require a human rights monitoring commission, and we will fund a free radio forum so that the truth about Vietnam is documented and heard in Vietnam and around the world.

"This is a strong bill, a bill that will create progress in Vietnam. Once again, I thank Congressman Smith and my colleagues for their efforts, and I look forward to working to get this bill passed quickly."

A Summary of the bill follows:

Vietnam Human Rights Act – Key Provisions

Findings

Focus on Vietnam's egregious suppression of religious liberty and persecution of Buddhists, Protestants, and Catholics. Include information on the intense persecution of the Montagnards, violations of workers rights, Vietnam's jamming of Radio Free Asia, and the US commitment to refugees.

Title I – Congressional-Executive Commission on Vietnam

Calls for the creation of a 17 member Commission to monitor and report on human rights in Vietnam.

The Commission will consists of 5 House Members, 5 Senators, 1 representative each from the departments of State, Commerce, and Labor, and 4 public representatives appointed by the President.

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The Commission will focus on:

- 1) Monitoring Vietnam's compliance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 2) Compiling a list of victims imprisoned or persecuted by the regime
- 3) Monitoring the regime's progress towards rule of law
- 4) Issue an annual report
- 5) Participate in Congressional Hearings

Title II - Promotion of Freedom and Democracy in Vietnam

A - Prohibition on Non-humanitarian Assistance to the Government of Vietnam

Prohibits Non-humanitarian US Assistance to Vietnam in FY 2004 unless the government:

- 1) Makes substantial progress towards releasing political and religious prisoners
- 2) Makes substantial progress towards respecting religious freedom
- 3) Makes substantial progress towards allowing open access to the US for our refugee program
- 4) Makes substantial progress towards respecting the rights of ethnic minority groups in the central highlands.
- 5) Is not acting in complicity with organizations engaged in the trafficking of human persons

The President is allowed to waive the restriction on aid if he deems that certain aid projects would help improve progress towards human rights

B - Assistance to Support Democracy in Vietnam

Authorizes \$2 million each for FY '04 and FY '05 for NGOs and organizations that promote human rights and nonviolent democratic change in Vietnam.

C - United States Public Diplomacy

Radio Free Asia

Establishes the overcoming of jamming of Radio Free Asia by Vietnam US policy

Call upon the Secretary of State to submit on a report to Congress on these efforts

Authorizes \$9.1 million in FY '04 and \$1.1 million in FY '05 for this purpose

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	United S	States	Educational	and	Cultural	Exchange	Program
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Establishes promotion of cultural exchanges with Vietnam that promote freedom and democracy in Vietnam.

D – United States Refugee Policy

Establishes as US policy the extension of the US refugee programs to Vietnamese who would have previously been eligible but missed deadlines because of circumstances beyond their control.

Authorizes sums necessary in the Bureau of Migration and Refugee Assistance for FY 03-05.

E - Annual Report on Progress Toward Freedom and Democracy in Vietnam

Calls upon the Secretary of State to issue on annual report on the President's determination on nonhumanitarian foreign assistance, progress towards securing transmission of Radio Free Asia, and other aspects of the act.

Differences from HR 2833, version of the bill that stalled in the Senate in the 107th Congress:

Includes the creation of a Congressional Commission

Differences from HR 2368, the original version of the Vietnam Human Rights Act in the 107th Congress: Does not include a call for the US to use its influence and voting power at international organizations to prohibit non-humanitarian US assistance from going to Vietnam.

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